Mission of the Course

The purpose of this course is to aid students in building a foundation for conducting political inquiry across the sub-fields in the discipline of political science. The course begins with a discussion of argumentation which is central to all disciplines from American politics and international relations to political theory and comparative politics. The course then focuses on the production of evidence to support individual arguments. Over the course of the semester, students will become intelligent users and consumers of a wide variety of investigatory techniques including, experiments, surveys, large-N statistical studies, formal models, computer simulation, content analysis, historical case studies, and interviews. The class will explore the strengths and weaknesses of these methods in order to identify when and where each is most appropriate. This survey course is designed to introduce students to topics that can be explored in greater depth in subsequent graduate courses offered within the Political Science Department, across the University at Albany, and at specialized programs (e.g., the ICPSR Summer Program (http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/sumprog/) and The Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research (http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/programs/cqrm/institute.html)).

This class is a required course in the Political Science doctoral program curriculum. It is typically taken by graduate students during the first year of the doctoral program. There are no prerequisites.

Course Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to accomplish the following activities:

1. Understand the elements of an argument,
2. Recognize, diagram and evaluate arguments in the published literature,
3. Develop a systematic literature review in order to identify an interesting research question,
4. Summarize, evaluate, and apply a wide range of empirical methods of analysis,
5. Evaluate the strengths and weakness of each empirical method in particular research settings, and
6. Construct innovative multi-method research designs for research questions.

Blended Course Format

This course will be taught in a “blended” format for the first time. A blended course falls somewhere between a traditional face-to-face class and a fully online class. In the Political Science Department, traditional face-to-face graduate classes meet for three hours per week. In our blended class, we will reduce the traditional meeting time to two hours and spend one hour in online discussions and assignments. In most weeks, students should expect to spend 30 minutes...
participating in an online discussion board or assignment prior to the class meeting in order to prepare for in class discussion and 30 minutes participating in online discussion board or assignment after the class in order to reinforce the central concepts for the week. The total amount of work required of students will not change; I expect each graduate student to spend a total (in and out of class) of approximately 10 hours each week on this class.

Why use a blended format? In many cases, the blended format can enhance student learning relative to other formats by increasing student engagement with course concepts. This course is based on the philosophy that students learn through a series of phases: 1) individual reading and writing; 2) group discussion, analysis, and choice; and 3) individual reflect on learning. Therefore, this course will have a steady weekly cycle that progresses through the three phases.

Phase 1: By Monday night at 11:59 pm each week: Complete the required reading for the week and complete the 30 minute preparation exercise (assignment or discussion board) posted on the Blackboard website. On Tuesday morning, the instructor will publish all the replies so that students can review the replies of each other prior to class.

Phase 2: Attend class for face-to-face discussion on Tuesday night.

Phase 3: By Wednesday night at 11:59 pm: Complete the 30 minute reflection exercise (assignment or discussion board) on the Blackboard website. If students wish, this reflection can be completed immediately after class during the time a student would normally still be sitting in class.

One of the big complaints of the blended learning format is that students feel that they must be on call 24/7. Although this pressure can emerge with some instructors, I have no intention of demanding constant participation via the web site. Rather, the class will have a steady weekly cycle that should accommodate most student schedules. However, the work will be spread over three days (30 minutes by Monday, 120 minutes on Tuesday, and 30 minutes by Wednesday) rather than all on one day.

The expectation is that all students will be able to use the central features of Blackboard to access readings, participate in discussions, and complete assessments. If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard in particular or web-based course management systems in general, you should complete the on-line Blackboard tutorials by the end of the first week of class. These tutorials are accessible through the Student Frequently Asked Questions page: http://www.albany.edu/its/bls/faq_student.htm.

Requirements of the Course
Students' final grades will be based on the following assignments:
1) Weekly Blackboard Preparation and Reflection Exercises (10%),
2) Individual Readiness Assessment Tests (15%),
3) Team Readiness Assessment Tests (10%),
4) Three Five-Page Research Designs (45%), and
5) A Thirty Minute Oral Final Exam (20%).

First, each week students will be asked to prepare for class discussion by completing a short 30 minute on-line exercise, usually in the form of responding to a discussion board or placing a response to an assignment in a drop box. Although the type of activity will vary, the purpose of the activity will be constant: to compel students to reflect on the reading prior to participating in in-class discussion. Student responses will be graded on a simple scale (Excellent, Good, Fair, Poor, and Failure).
Second, in many weeks students will complete an Individual Readiness Assessment Test during the first 20 minutes of class on Tuesday night. These assessments will be multiple choice quizzes based on the week’s readings (or the relationship between the week’s readings and prior weeks activities). The objective of this assignment is to ensure that students have mastered the reading materials (i.e., capable of understanding, summarizing, critiquing, connecting, and applying the readings). After half the class has turned in their assessment, the remaining students will be given 5 minutes to complete the quiz.

Third, in many weeks students will complete a Team Individual Readiness Assessment Test during the first hour of the class. This activity will typically take place after the students complete their Individual Readiness Assessment Test. All students on the team will receive the same grade for the team test. If there are less then ten students in the class, then the entire class will be a team.

Fourth, students will write three research designs. Each concisely written design should not exceed five pages in length (single-spaced pages; 1-inch margins; 11-point font). Students will be asked to present one research design to the class; the remaining research designs can be turned in at the beginning of any class period, but only one design may be turned in any given week. Designs that will be presented in class must be posted to the course web page one week prior to the due date. Late papers will be penalized a third of a letter grade per day late.

Finally, students will take an oral exam during the final exam period. The purpose of the oral exam is to encourage students to integrate the material discussed over the course of the semester and to prepare them for the oral comprehensive exams in their major field. Every student will serve as both an exam taker and exam evaluator. The instructor and two students from the class will form each evaluation committee. Each oral exam, which will be approximately 30 minutes in length, will probe the student's knowledge of the field and their ability to conceptually move beyond the readings. At a minimum, students should be prepared to summarize individual readings and compare and contrast readings across the course. At a maximum, students will be expected to identify gaps in the literature and suggest ways to fill these gaps with unique research designs.

Attendance and Participation: In graduate school, the expectation is that students will attend every class session and actively participate in class every discussion each week. I expect students to have read and thought about the material assigned for that week. If language or some other barrier inhibits you from participating actively, you should meet with the instructor during the first two weeks of class to devise a solution. Attendance is not participation. Students missing more than one class session without prior approval of the instructor will be penalized a letter grade per missed class.

Required Text

Given the small class size, I have elected to have students purchase the one required book through Amazon.com. The required readings are marked with an [R] (for the book you should purchase) or [R*] (for articles that will be on the Blackboard course page). Immediately after the required readings, I have listed several suggested readings for each topic which are marked [S]. You have to look up the suggested reading on your own.

In certain weeks (e.g., Week 4 and 5), I have assigned two versions of the required reading. The first is a more difficult reading designed for advanced undergraduate students and beginning graduate students. The second is an easier version designed for undergraduates. I strongly encourage the adventurous to read the more advanced reading. If you find that you cannot comprehend the more advanced material on the first reading, I would read the simpler chapter before tackling the more difficult reading. Although students choosing only to read the simpler readings over the course of the semester should be able to pass the course, they are unlikely to receive outstanding grades on the research designs and final exam.

Summary Course Schedule

Weekly Course Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Start</th>
<th>End</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Online Preparation (Monday)</th>
<th>In-class Assessment (Tuesday)</th>
<th>Online Reflection (Wednesday)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>31-Aug</td>
<td>5-Sep</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6-Sep</td>
<td>12-Sep</td>
<td>Argumentation</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>13-Sep</td>
<td>19-Sep</td>
<td>Research Ethics</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>20-Sep</td>
<td>26-Sep</td>
<td>Concepts</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>27-Sep</td>
<td>3-Oct</td>
<td>Experiments</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4-Oct</td>
<td>10-Oct</td>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>11-Oct</td>
<td>17-Oct</td>
<td>Race and Politics</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18-Oct</td>
<td>24-Oct</td>
<td>Large N Statistics</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>25-Oct</td>
<td>31-Oct</td>
<td>Formal Models</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2-Nov</td>
<td>7-Nov</td>
<td>Computer Simulations</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>8-Nov</td>
<td>14-Nov</td>
<td>Content Analysis</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>15-Nov</td>
<td>21-Nov</td>
<td>Case Studies</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>22-Nov</td>
<td>28-Nov</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>Discussion Board</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>29-Nov</td>
<td>5-Dec</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outline of Classes and Required Readings

**Week 1 (9/1): Introduction to Research in Political Science**
- Online Preparation Activity: No.
- In-class Assessment: No.
- Online Reinforcement Activity: No.

This class will be devoted to an overview of the class and course mechanics. By the end of this short informational class, you should be able to determine if it suits your needs and interests. No assigned readings.

**Week 2 (9/8): Argumentation and Hypothesis Testing**
- Online Preparation Activity: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- In-class Assessment: Yes: Individual and Team Readiness Assessment Test.
- Online Reinforcement Activity: Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

In this class, we will discuss the subject of argumentation. In the social sciences and much of the humanities, scholars make arguments about causal claims, beliefs, values, etc. We will discuss the history of argumentation and the components of an argument. Although the
assigned reading is not difficult (i.e., it is a typical undergraduate text), applying the reading to an existing article or your own writing is more challenging. After completing the reading, you should take an article or book chapter that you are familiar with and diagram the argument by labeling claims, evidence, warrants, and (if necessary) any qualifications. Please bring the article and the diagram to class.


Week 3 (9/15): Research Ethics

- Online Preparation Activity: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- In-class Assessment: None.
- Online Reinforcement Activity: Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

Research involving human beings raises a number of ethical concerns. Some of these concerns will be raised in future readings (e.g., the discussion of experiments in the Handbook of Social Psychology). Early research in both the social and physical sciences often failed to adequately protect the subjects from physical and emotional harm. In response, Human Subject Review Boards have been created at universities in order to ensure subjects provide informed consent, research is not harmful, and the subjects leave the process fully understanding research puzzle.

[R*] Students MUST complete the University at Albany’s on-line human subjects training module. Completion of this module, which will take a couple of hours, will allow you to be a research assistant on faculty projects and conduct your own research with human subjects. You only need to complete the training once during your academic career. The on-line module page is accessible from the UAlbany research web page (http://www.albany.edu/research/) under “Research Compliance” or directly at UAlbany Research Compliance page (http://www.albany.edu/research/compliance/). Look for the “training link” in the left hand menu and then scroll down until you see the “Collaborative IRB Training (CITI)” link (http://www.citiprogram.org/).


**Week 4 (9/22): Concepts: Developing and Measuring**

- **Online Preparation Activity**: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- **In-class Assessment**: Yes: Individual and Team Readiness Assessment Test.
- **Online Reinforcement Activity**: Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

In this class we will explore the topic of “concepts” in the social sciences. How do you define concepts such as democracy or racism? What are the critical dimensions of these concepts? How can you measure these critical dimensions? What are the implications of concept development for making persuasive arguments?


**Week 5 (9/29): Experiments**

- **Online Preparation Activity**: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- **In-class Assessment**: Yes: Individual and Team Readiness Assessment Test.
- **Online Reinforcement Activity**: Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

Although experiments are a cornerstone of the natural sciences and widely used in the social sciences, they have been slow to catch on in political science. The strength of experiments lies in the researcher’s ability to control the environment and manipulate particular variables with great precision. We will examine a number of different experiments from political science and social psychology in order to illustrate the wide variety of experimental methods that have been used in the social sciences.

a. **Experimental Method:**


b. Example of an Experiment in Political Science:


c. Critiques of Experiments:


d. Further Readings about Experiments:


Survey research involves asking people questions in person, over the phone, via the mail, or on the internet. Much of survey research involves probing the opinion of the public at home and abroad. While the simplest surveys are descriptive tools, experimental surveys can probe causal mechanisms with great accuracy. This week we will discuss a variety of questions including: How does one conduct a survey? Why are some survey questions good and others bad? How do you select a sample? What is the difference between an open-ended and close-ended question?

a. The Survey Research Method:


b. Example of a Survey:


c. Critiques of Surveys:


d. Further Readings about Surveys:


**Week 7 (10/13): Surveys and Experiments Revisited: Race and Politics**

- **Online Preparation Activity:** Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- **In-class Assessment:** None.
- **Online Reinforcement Activity:** Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

One way to understand the strengths and weaknesses of various methods of investigation is to focus on a particular research puzzle. In this week, we will discuss the issue of race and politics from a methodological perspective. How might you use surveys to measure racial attitudes? Are racial attitudes more difficult to measure than other attitudes? How might one use experiments to probe the impact of racial beliefs on opinion and behavior? Can experiments get around self-censorship?

**a. Racism Experiments and Surveys:**


[R*] Biernat, Monica and Christian S. Crandall. “Racial Attitudes.” In John P. Robinson, Phillip R. Shaver, and Lawrence S. Wrightsman (eds.) Measuring Political Attitudes. San Diego, CA: Academic Press. Pages 297-411. The bulk of this reading is survey questions. You should come prepared to discuss the strengths and weakness of different survey instruments (e.g., the Modern Racism Scale (MRS) versus older measures of racism).

b. Measurement, Sampling, and Questionnaire Development:


c. Further Readings about Racism:


Week 8 (10/20): *Large-N Statistical Studies*

- Online Preparation Activity: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- In-class Assessment: Yes: Individual and Team Readiness Assessment Test.
- Online Reinforcement Activity: Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

**Large-N statistical studies** (often called “quasi-experimental designs or correlational analysis) are studies of the historical behavior of individuals or groups. Are democracies less likely to use for against other democracies? Are Republican controlled legislatures more likely to cut taxes than Democratic controlled legislatures? Are states with agricultural economies more likely to experience a communist or fascist revolution than states with commercial economies? In order to analyze these questions, we look to the past and employ statistical methods such as regressions in order to discover “average” or “typical” patterns of behavior.

a. Large-N Statistical Method:


b. Example of Large-N Statistical Study:

c. Critique of Large-N Statistical Studies:


d. Further Readings on Large-N Statistical Studies:


Week 9 (10/27): Formal Models

- Online Preparation Activity: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- In-class Assessment: None.
- Online Reinforcement Activity: Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

Beginning in the 1970s and proliferating in the 1980s, formal models have become a central component of research in political science. A formal model is mathematical representation of a problem or process. By carefully articulating assumptions and decision rules, formal model generate predictions about expected behavior in particular settings. Although formal models are a hypothesis generating tools, the predictions of the models can be verified using other methods of investigation.

a. Formal Method:


b. Example of a Formal Model:


c. Critique of Formal Modeling:


d. Further Readings on Formal Models:

**Week 10 (11/3): Computer Simulations:**
- **Online Preparation Activity:** Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- **In-class Assessment:** Yes: Individual and Team Readiness Assessment Test.
- **Online Reinforcement Activity:** Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

Computer simulations have only recently emerged as a major method of research in political science. Computer simulations are similar to formal models in that the researcher must carefully specify all assumptions and decision rules. However, the two methods diverge greatly in how the problem is solved. While a formal modeler would solve the problem analytically, the simulation researcher will “simulate” the model in order to inductively discover the solution. In general, simulations are useful for complex and/or non-linear problems that cannot be solved analytically. In this class (as in political science more generally), we will focus on a particular type of simulation called “agent-based model.” In an agent-based model, the researcher specifies the properties of the agent and rules for agent-to-agent interaction. Once the simulation begins, both the agents and the environment evolve -- sometimes moving toward an equilibrium and sometimes not.

a. The Computer Simulation Method:


b. Example of a Computer Simulation:


c. Critiques of Computer Simulation:


d. **Further Readings on Computer Simulations:**

**Week 11 (11/10): Content Analysis**
- **Online Preparation Activity:** Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- **In-class Assessment:** Yes: Individual and Team Readiness Assessment Test.
- **Online Reinforcement Activity:** Yes (due by Wednesday night at 11:59 pm).

Content analysis involves quantitatively coding the “content” of written documents, audio transcripts, radio programs, television programs, public speeches, or internet pages. Content analysis allows us to explore the beliefs, attitudes, and preferences of actors (even after they are dead). The method is often used in conjunction with other methods in order to establish a firmer causal link. For example, a researcher might explore whether a rise in anti-communist statements in national newspapers (using content analysis) precedes the rise of anti-communist attitudes in public opinion polls (using a survey).

a. **The Method of Content Analysis:**

b. **Examples of Content Analysis:**

c. **Critique of Content Analysis:**

d. **Further Readings on Content Analysis:**
outstanding example using ancient Chinese texts to assess beliefs and predicted behavior.


**Week 12 (11/17): Historical Case Studies and Archival Research**

- Online Preparation Activity: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
- In-class Assessment: None.
- Online Reinforcement Activity: None.

Case studies are perhaps the best known method of investigation. Case studies of particular events (e.g., the Cuban Missile Crisis) and a small number of events (e.g., social revolutions) are common in all sub-fields of political science. The strength of the method lay in the author’s ability to trace the process of a causal argument. This week’s class will address a variety of questions including: How do you select cases? How do you eliminate competing explanation? What is the relationship between case studies and large-N studies? Why do case studies often reach different conclusions than quantitative studies?

a. The Case Study Method:


b. Example of a Case Study:
   [R*] Kier, Elizabeth. 1997. “Chapter 5: Explaining British Doctrine.” and
   “Chapter 6: Culture and British Doctrine.” In Elizabeth Kier’s Imagining
   War: French And British Military Doctrine Between The Wars. Princeton,

c. Critiques of Case Studies:
   [R*] “The Qualitative-Quantitative Disputation: Gary King, Robert O. Keohane,
   and Sidney Verba’s Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in
   Qualitative Research.” 1995. American Political Science Review 89/2
   (June) 454-481. NOTE: THIS READING WAS ASSIGNED FOR WEEK 7
   AS WELL.
   Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research. Princeton, NJ: 
   Princeton University Press.

d. Further Readings on Case Studies:
   1) Skocpol, Theda. 1994. Social Revolutions In The Modern World. Cambridge,
   UK: Cambridge University Press.
   2) Sil, Rudy. 2002. Managing “Modernity”: Work, Community and Authority in
   Lat-Industrializing Japan and Russia. Ann Arbor, MI: University of
   Michigan Press.
   Governance: Doubles Crises and Debt” in Vinod Aggarwal and Brigitte
   London: Royal Institute of International Studies.
   International Security 19,2 (Fall), 5-49.
   A classic work on systematic analysis of multiple case studies.
   6) Snyder, Jack. 1984. Ideology of the Offensive: Military Decision Making and
   7) Milner, Helen V. 1988. Resisting Protectionism: Global Industries and the
   8) Khong, Yuen Foong. 1992. Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu,
   Press.

Week 13 (11/24): Interviews
   • Online Preparation Activity: Yes (due by Monday night at 11:59 pm).
   • In-class Assessment: No.
   • Online Reinforcement Activity: No.

Interviewing is an extremely common method of inquiry, particularly in foreign policy
research and comparative politics. While interviews are often completed as part of a case study,
the interview method can be used in a wide variety of situations. A one end of the spectrum, the
interview is simply one observation in a survey (i.e., a large number of interviewees and a highly
structured interview instrument that allows the quantitative analysis of the data). At the other end
of the spectrum, the interview is a completely unstructured question and answer period between
two people. Depending on how they plan to use the results of the interview, researchers select a
point somewhere between these two points.

a. Method:

b. Example:

c. Critique:

d. Further Readings:


Week 14 (12/1): Conclusions
• Online Preparation Activity: No
• In-class Assessment: No.
• Online Reinforcement Activity: No.

No assigned reading for this week.